Interview with Edwin Webb Martin

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR EDWIN WEBB MARTIN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: What brought you into the Foreign Service?

MARTIN: Well, I guess it was the fact that I had an international childhood, in the sense that I spent 11 years of my childhood in India, where my father was a missionary.

Q: So you were a missionary kid.

MARTIN: I was a missionary kid, yes. And I remember when I was as young as 11 or 12, that I used to read the “Madras Mail” every day.

Q: That was a newspaper?

MARTIN: That was an English-language newspaper published in Madras. Of course, in those days, India was part of the British empire. I read it with a great deal of interest, and ever since then, I've been quite an avid newspaper reader of national/international affairs. I think that somehow I just felt that I wanted to get into an international role of some sort, and Foreign Service obviously came to mind. You're in the service of your country, and that appealed to me.

Q: Had you had any contact with the Foreign Service?

MARTIN: Not really. Not really, no. Interestingly enough, later on, when my parents went back to India and left me in the United States, at the age of 15, they became very good friends of one of our consuls in Madras, but at that time, when I was a youngster, we didn't have any contacts with it.

Q: When you were getting your education—I'm speaking of when you came back to the United States and went to college—were you planning your education to prepare yourself for the Foreign Service?

MARTIN: Actually, I had all of my high school in the States as well as college. I was one of the last of that generation of missionaries' children that was left at home at a very early age. I was barely 15 when my parents went back for their seven-year tour in India, and so I was on my own for seven years as a high school and college student. Yes, I think that not so much in high school, actually, but when I went to college, I began to think in terms of the possibility of going to the Foreign Service, and in my senior year...

Q: What school?

MARTIN: I went to Oberlin College, which, of course, has a lot of international connections. My senior year, an alumnus of Oberlin, who was in the Foreign Service—and his name was Jack Service—came back on leave, I guess. This was early 1939.

Q: He was one of the China hands, wasn't he?

MARTIN: He was one of the China hands, that's right. And he talked about his life in the Foreign Service in China, and I thought, “This is really an interesting career.” So I got a fellowship at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and at that time Fletcher was a very young school and a very small school. At that time the maximum enrollment at Fletcher was 50 students—50 students. And that was partly because we had to take a number

of our courses at Harvard. I took several courses at Harvard. Harvard, at that time, was apparently unwilling to have this cooperative arrangement with Fletcher School unless Fletcher kept its enrollment down. But anyway, going to Fletcher, of course, gave me a good preparation for the Foreign Service.

I took the exam at the beginning, more or less not expecting to pass, because I didn't do a bit of studying for it. I actually got married in the middle of August and took the exam in September. (Laughs) I really didn't do any studying. I wasn't going to take it, but a friend said, “Well, it's good practice, you know, and doesn't matter.” Well, I actually passed it by the skin of my teeth, and went on to pass the oral.

Q: You had assignments elsewhere, I notice—Bermuda and the Belgian Congo, when you first came in.

MARTIN: Yes.

Q: Had you kept Asia in mind as an area you wanted to go to?

MARTIN: No, not particularly. That's an interesting question, because, I guess, because of my background as a kid in India and the school I went to, which was an American school actually established by people in our mission back in about 1900, but by the time I went there in the Twenties, there were American kids from all over South India and as far away as Bahrain and Muscat, also from Burma and Thailand. I remember there was one kid from as far away as Singapore. Imagine these kids coming all that way to school in South India. But they wanted an American education so they could go back and fit into American schools.

Well, some of the most fascinating stories that I ever heard came from a missionary doctor in Arabia, whose kids were there. In fact, some of my best friends were children of another missionary in Arabia. So I got very interested in the Middle East, you might say.

During my first year, I think it was, in the Foreign Service, some circular came around requesting or asking people to sign up for foreign languages, and I signed up for Arabic. But then the war interfered with all of that, and it completely washed that out, and I was eventually drafted and went into the Army.

I guess I didn't answer the question about Asia. You want to know how I happened to get into the China business. Well, that was one of these almost accidental things. After I got out of the Army—and I was let out early because all Foreign Service officers who were drafted were let out early, so we could resume our careers of service—I went to the State Department. They asked me where I wanted to go, and I didn't express any particular preference. They said, “How about Shanghai? We need people there?” I thought Shanghai was interesting. So they sent me up to the Office of Chinese Affairs, and there I met a fairly young vice consul named Fulton Freeman, who was a Chinese language officer and a brilliant linguist. He had been given the job of recruiting Chinese language officers, and he soon persuaded me it would be more fun to be in China if I knew the language. So I was one of the first three post-war China language officers, and they sent me to Yale.

Q: At that time, mainland China was under Chiang Kai-shek.

MARTIN: Had been for a long time, yes. That's right. During my tour in China as a language officer, and then subsequently as a vice consul in Hangzhou, the civil war was raging. While I was in Hangzhou, not only Manchuria, but most of North China fell to the Communists. This was an interesting period in China.

Q: Since we're concentrating on your time in Burma, you went to Burma as a second secretary in 1950 to '51. What brought about this assignment?

MARTIN: Well, I think that's important, too, because it gives you a flavor of the times. I was in Hangzhou, as I said, when most of North China fell to the Communists, and because of the threat of a civil war to the safety of Americans, many Americans were evacuated in the

latter part of '48, and among those were the dependents or the families of Foreign Service officers in certain posts. I was in Hangzhou, which is about 600 miles up the Yangtze River and rather exposed, and my wife and our two little girls were evacuated from China, along with families from Nanking, the embassy in Nanking, and Shanghai, by the U.S. Marines. They were flown to Manila, and there they were—I forget how many, there were certainly 100 or more, including women and children—and they were put up there in an abandoned U.S. Army camp, under rather trying conditions. So that I was separated from my wife and children, and during our separation, she gave birth to twins there in Manila.

Q: Good heavens! That brought the number to four.

MARTIN: That brought the number to four, doubled our children, and I was in Hangzhou all this time. Our communications were virtually cut off, so that we had to communicate by cable.

Well, all this by way of background to say that when I finally got a transfer, after being overdue for leave for nearly a year, I was transferred to Taiwan after home leave. I managed to get out of China, and I won't take time to tell that story. Got down to the Philippines, and we had a nice boat trip back to the States, for home leave, consultation, and so forth, and on to Taiwan, where I arrived in September of 1949.

Well, by January of 1950, the mainland, having fallen to the Communists, and they were threatening Taiwan, the State Department decided to reduce the staff in Taiwan, in anticipation of a Communist invasion. Since I had been separated from my family already for some period of time, and the twins were then—they were born in the Philippines—were less than a year old, they decided that rather than evacuate my wife and family again, leaving us separated, that they would transfer me to Rangoon. I had only been in Taiwan for four or five months.

Now, another aspect of that transfer was that we still had consular and diplomatic officials in China, but in the latter part of January, the Department had made a decision, for

reasons which I don't have time to go into now, to pull out of China. So we were facing a prospect of not having the usual flow of information from China, so the department decided to put Chinese language officers, that is, Foreign Service officers who had been trained in the Chinese language, and most of us had served already some time in China, put them on the periphery of China. I was assigned to Burma in that capacity. I was a political officer, of course, but my particular expertise was China and Chinese. My particular job in Rangoon at that time was to become acquainted with the Chinese community, which was very large in Burma, as it is in most Southeast Asian countries, to try to watch what was happening on the China-Burma border, which was the longest border of any Southeast Asian country. Burma, by the way, is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, about the size of Texas.

So here was a brand-new field. Those two reasons are why I was sent to Rangoon. I, of course, was the first Chinese-speaking Foreign Service officer ever to be assigned to Rangoon. Later on I became chief of the political section and was in charge of overall political affairs and reporting in the embassy. Of course, we had a small embassy. It's a very small embassy.

Q: What was your rank?

MARTIN: I was a Class IV officer.

Q: So you were a good, solid mid-career officer at that point.

MARTIN: That's right. That's right. I was a Class IV officer. As a matter of fact, I'd only been in Burma about three weeks when I was charg# briefly, because we had no ambassador at that time, and the charg# had to go to a chiefs of mission conference, so as the brand-new—well, a Class IV officer less than a year—I was the second ranking man in the embassy. So you can see it was a pretty small affair.

Q: Could you describe how you saw the situation in Burma at the time you went there? We're talking about 1950.

MARTIN: We're talking about 1950. The situation was that Burma had an elected government, it was a democracy. A fairly young man by the name of U Nu was the prime minister. Most of the leadership, the political leaders in power were people in their thirties, so they weren't much older than I. I was about 32 when I went to Burma. They were idealists in a way; they were Socialists in outlook, but not Communists. I think they were genuine democrats. Of course, they were strongly anti-imperialist, as they would say. Burma kicked the British out.

Q: Only two years before.

MARTIN: That's right. In 1948, Burma got its independence. Of course, we have to remember that the Burmese Nationalists, who were well before the war looking to oust the British, cooperated with the Japanese. They soon became disillusioned because the Japanese came in, and, of course, they defeated the British, and the American and the Chinese troops who were there under General Stilwell. The Japanese never got quite as far as the India border, but they had conquered a good part of Burma, the most productive part. But they soon began to show their true colors, as people who did not respect Burmese sovereignty. And although Burma was nominally an independent country, in fact, the Japanese military ran the country. So many of the Burmese became disillusioned with them, and many of them cooperated later on with the British and American OSS people and others that were dropped into the country and so forth.

So when I got there, you had a situation where Burma had a reputation of being independent-minded and rather anti-British, compared to some of the other colonies. They had received their independence, some say, before they actually wanted it; the British, when the Burmese made certain demands of them, had turned them down, and said,

“Okay, go ahead. Take your independence if you want it.” (Laughs) So they set up in January an independent government.

Q: This was January 1948.

MARTIN: 1948. I got there in January '50, you see, two years later. In the summer of 1947 a very tragic thing had occurred; Aung San and others were gunned down by assassins during a cabinet meeting. The assassins were hired by one of the opposition politicians, a really conservative guy, who was subsequently tried and hung. And this left the Burmese without their national hero and the leadership they might have had, and which they needed. Because Burma had been a kind of appendage to the Indian empire, there had not been trained in Burma the kind of civil service which had been trained in India. And by the late Forties, when India became independent—this is the year, I think, '47, the year before Burma—India had a large number of highly trained civil servants who had for years had experience in administering India. Actually, Indian civil servants had run Burma, had helped to run Burma, for a long time, and only in the Thirties had Burma been separated from India and been treated as a separate entity rather than an appendage. So all of this helps to explain why the Burmese were particularly nationalistic and bitter. They felt they were not only a colony, but a second class colony. That also explains why Burma did not have the kind of political leadership or administrative leadership that you had in India, for example.

Then when they had some of the few leaders they did have murdered like this, it left these less experienced people, like U Nu. One of those people was Ne Win; Ne Win was then defense minister. Burma at that time seemed to be in a rather bad way, but compared to what it became 20 years later, it looks now like they were in a pretty good way. (Laughs) And it had a good reason for being in a bad way. After all, it had been occupied by the Japanese, the Japanese had fought their way up to the northern part of the country, and then later on, the Allies came in and drove them back out, and they surrendered. So Burma had been fought over, had been bombed by both sides, and it was a shambles.

The economy was a wreck, the oil industry, which used to be important, was a wreck. So there was good reason why it was in a bad way.

Then another very important reason was that there were many insurgencies in Burma. These insurgencies were both ideological and ethnically motivated—ideologically motivated and ethnically motivated.

Do you want me to go into that? I don't know how much time you have.

Q: I think some of this will come up later. I think maybe more or less concentrating on your role and the embassy's role, some of this insurgency was Chinese, wasn't it?

MARTIN: Well, that's important, I think, to look at. It wasn't Chinese in the sense that Chinese troops were fighting or Chinese were fighting in Burma. The Burma Communist Party was split into two factions. The larger faction was called the White Flag Communists, and the smaller faction was called the Red Flag Communists. Both had armies in the field, and the White Flag Communists did get support of some kind, although at that time, probably not a great deal of logistic support but more ideological support, training and so forth, from the Chinese Communists.

Then in addition to those two, I'll just mention a couple of the major insurgent groups, because when we get to 20 years later, when I'm in Burma again, you'll find that they're still fighting. (Laughs) There were the Kachins. They're a large group of tribal people, sometimes called hill people because they live up in the mountains, the hill country in northern Burma, especially northeastern Burma. Then there are the Shans. The Shans are related to the Thais ethnically and linguistically, and also both of these groups, and many of the tribal groups are related to what the Chinese now call minority people living on the other side of the Burma-China border, which, as I said, is a very long border. And the Shans had a rebellion going, and I don't know at that time whether they had more than one

army. I think they were relatively minor, and back in those days, they were more important than when I was there 20 years later.

Then the main, the most feared rebel group at that particular time when I arrived in Burma, were the Karens. Karens were also hill people, but there are many Karen villages in the delta, in the Irrawaddy delta area, and the Karens and the Kachins both had been sort of favored by the British. The Burmans are the majority people in Burma, the ethnic Burmans. When I say Burmese, I mean a citizen of Burma or the people who live in Burma generally, although it's hard to keep this distinction in mind. But when I say Burman, I mean the ethnic Burmans who dominated the country. Ethnic Burmans were around 72-73% of the country, and the remaining 27 or 28% of the country were divided among these various hill peoples or minority groups.

Well, the British, having conquered Burma by overthrowing the Burmese king, who was a Burman, had favored the Karens and the Kachins as recruits for their military. They felt they were more reliable, and they were more trainable and so forth. So that the Karens, particularly being, I think, more numerous than the Kachins, after independence, demanded certain concessions, and some actually demanded an independent Karen state, which they didn't get. The result was that these people rebelled against the government, becoming insurgents, and since they had excellent training and discipline—some of the top officers in the British Burma Army were Karens—they had a lot of know-how and expertise. So they posed a real threat, and they came very close to invading Rangoon itself. In fact, when I and my family arrived in Burma towards the end of January, the Karens were just on the other side of the airport, and they were so close that when we went into Rangoon from the airport, we had to go through two military checkpoints, barriers. And just a few weeks before we arrived, Karens had actually shelled Rangoon.

So the country at that time was—I don't know what the proportions were, but a large area of the country, probably more than half the country, well over half of the country, I'd say, was in the hands of various insurgents of various political views.

Q: How were the Chinese regarded there? I take it they were more the merchant class.

MARTIN: That's right. The Chinese in Burma were, as they were in most Southeast Asian countries, the merchant class. They were the rice millers. Much of the rice paddy land had been owned by absentee Indian landowners, but the people who bought the rice, bought it and milled it, and then sold it and put it in international trade—well, I guess the British probably monopolized pretty much the international trade—they were the rice millers and the small manufacturers and the merchants. And they were highly organized.

My principal job when I went there was to study this community, looking at it also from the point of view of what influence China, particularly now that the Communists had taken that country, could have there. And so if I have time, I will explain a little bit about the community, the Chinese community.

Q: Yes, please.

MARTIN: Shall I do that? Because that actually was the principal job I had there.

I found that the Chinese community, of course, as it is in most Southeast Asian countries, was heavily concentrated in the cities, particularly Rangoon, but also Mandalay, although you would find Chinese merchants and even Chinese restaurants in the smaller towns. It was comprised, especially in Rangoon, of people from two areas primarily, one from Canton, one from Amoy, and they speak different languages. Now that's important, because the Chinese communities were highly organized. For example, a typical Chinese in Rangoon might belong to four or five organizations, which might include a society of his name. For example, all the Li's would have an organization. Another society he would belong to would be his school, the alumni of his school, because the Chinese have their own schools. And another organization he might belong to would be his guild, if he were a rice merchant or if he were whatever, he belonged to a guild of that group. Then he might belong to either a political party or a secret society. Actually, most of them belonged to

some secret society. So he would belong to four or five organizations, and the Chinese took care of each other. They were very—you didn't see a poor Chinese. You didn't see a Chinese become a charg# on the Burmese Government. The Chinese looked after their own. They were highly organized.

Now, in the eastern part of the country, in the hill country, you also had Chinese who had come over the border from Yunnan—it was a large province on the border of Burma. So you had two things there to watch in terms of the Chinese—the border, the people who came across the border, and the overseas Chinese merchant community in the cities, Rangoon in particular.Now, an interesting thing about the Rangoon Chinese community; it apparently had never been studied seriously by the government, they didn't seem to know anything about it or pay attention to it. I found that there were two main linguistic groups—those from Amoy and those from Canton. And that at that time there were four newspapers the Chinese published in Rangoon. I read all four of them every day. Two of them were politically more or less neutral, sort of fence-sitters in the struggle between the Nationalists (the Kuomintang) and the Communists. And one of the papers was an out and out pro-Nationalist, probably a Kuomintang paper, and that was run by Cantonese. One was Communist, very pro-Communist, and that was run by Amoy people. So that the place of origin of the individual Chinese in Rangoon determined to some extent what their political allegiance was. Now, this was because this highly organized Chinese community in Rangoon was linked to Chinese communities all over Southeast Asia. For example, the name organization in Rangoon might have links to those in Bangkok and so forth, or the guild organization, or the secret society and so forth would have such links.

In Singapore, you had a Chinese, whose name I forget at the moment, but he was a wealthy Chinese who came out very strongly and rather early in the favor of the Chinese Communist side, against the Nationalists. He was from Amoy. I think that his influence penetrated so far as Rangoon and tended to make the Amoy people pro-Communist.

I found also that this newspaper published by the Amoy faction was publishing news dispatches from the Burma Communist Party White Flag insurgents, just as though they had war correspondents with the White Flag insurgents. So that we learned quite a bit about them from this newspaper. No other newspaper published such news. As far as I know—and I'm very convinced of this—the Burmese Government had nobody who read Chinese and was following these newspapers. But here they had in their midst a Chinese newspaper, which was openly in favor of the White Flag Communists and actually had dispatches from them, telling of their victories or alleged victories against the Burmese Government.

So you had, I think, a very interesting situation there for the Burmese. Of course, they were brand-new. They were a brand-new government. They were struggling. The Chinese were a self-sufficient community, and they just didn't pay any attention to them.

Q: Did you share your knowledge with anybody in the Burmese Government?

MARTIN: I think it probably was. I can't remember exactly, but we had some intelligence liaison with them. I didn't do it personally, but I have a feeling that some of this was passed on, yes.

Q: What was your contact with the Burmese Government?

MARTIN: I did not have very much contact with the Burmese Government in those days, because I was really a specialist on this. I didn't have much contact in a formal sense. I did become acquainted with a number of young Burmese politicians, and at that time, the Burmese were still somewhat suspicious of us, but we had good contacts at middle level. It was fascinating to see the Burmese, who, as I say, were rather idealistic. They were socialistic in their outlook, and they felt that once having kicked out the British, they would then reap all of the fruits of their economy. Although it was in shambles, their natural resources were extremely plentiful, more so than many countries in Southeast Asia. And

they couldn't believe that things were not going as well as they should economically, and they looked around for some reason for it. In their somewhat, perhaps oversimplified view, the British imperialists had fastened onto Burma, and had exploited it. And there were many British companies that certainly made an awful lot of profit in Burma. But what they didn't realize, I think, is that these companies, these capitalists, these entrepreneurs, also brought very important assets to Burma, not only capital assets, but expertise and an ability to organize and to extract timber and sell rice and put it on the international market.

Q: Developing markets.

MARTIN: That's right. Developing markets. The Burmese had nobody, almost nobody, who had any experience. It wasn't their fault. It was a pity, and one good argument for saying that they had been exploited by the British. But the idea that if you just get rid of these exploiters, you're going to benefit from this, leaves out any consideration of the importance of entrepreneurship and knowing the international market and all.

Q: Did the Korean War have any impact on our embassy as such? Did we have any sort of assignment because of the concern?

MARTIN: No, no, I don't think so, because even before the Korean War broke out, although it's hard for me to pin it down to a matter of months, the Korean War broke out in June . . .

Q: June 25.

MARTIN: That's when we got into it, yes. June 25, 1950. I'd only been in Rangoon about four or five months.

Q: China came in in October 1950.

MARTIN: I think the Korean War itself had very little impact, but there is something else that I think is important before we leave this period in Burma. We had, in my first year

there for , the first time established an aid mission. We didn't call it AID in those days, but it was an economic assistance mission. And Burma, as you know, has been almost a model of non-alignment ever since independence. They've insisted on neutrality, and when it came to aid, why, they said, “Okay, if we take aid from the United States and Britain [British military assistance still existed at that time], we'll also take aid from Russia or whomever. We'll take it from all sides.” So we established an aid mission there, and it had nothing to do with the Korean War. This decision was made before the Korean War. But what was important, and one of the reasons I was sent there, was to see what was going on on the China border. What happened on the China border was not an incursion of Communist troops; but an incursion of Nationalist troops, the KMT, as they called them, KMT for Kuomintang.

Q: KMT.

MARTIN: They called them KMT troops. Under some Nationalist generals, and there were several thousand of them—I'm not sure we ever knew how many, but at least there were maybe 4,000 or 5,000, and they were well armed—they had been driven out of Yunnan by the People's Liberation Army, the Communist Army. So they came into Burma. And the Burmese obviously were very unhappy about this. The Burmese at that time,—I should say the Burmese Government—was fighting all these insurgencies, and the insurgents had a large part of the country in their hands. So the Burmese Government really had no possibility of keeping these fellows out or of dealing with them militarily. And the Burmese were convinced that these KMT troops—I'll call them KMT troops—were there as part of a U.S. policy. So that immediately put us in very hot water. They tried to pin the blame on us because we were known to be pro-Nationalist. And this all happened before the Korean War, but the same thing would have happened if there had been no Korean War.

Now, I don't know all of the facts. I suspect there was some clandestine connection with these fellows for some reason or other, but it did not come from us in Burma. In fact, everyone in our embassy was opposed, and we kept pointing out to the Department the

setbacks the KMT incursion had dealt our position in Burma, especially when this matter went to the U.N. The U.S. was all in favor of getting the Kuomintang out of Burma. We actually put pressure on the Chinese Nationalist Government in Taiwan, and with our assistance, they evacuated some of the KMT troops. But a lot of them weren't evacuated because they had no incentive to leave. They'd established themselves in the hill country there, and they became local war lords. And what was in it for them to go back to Taiwan?

The Burmese finally, in their helplessness, appealed to the U.N. which passed resolution to get the KMT troops out, and we were all in favor of it; but the situation was that these people were holed up in a place where you really had to come in with armed force to dig them out. We weren't willing to do that; the Nationalist Government didn't have the capability, nor were they willing to do it.

The KMT troops, the Chinese troops, that came into Burma. The point that I wanted to make was that the Burmese apparently felt that they needed to make some gesture to show how strongly they felt on the matter, so what they did was to close down our aid mission, although we were really not responsible, and we had tried our best. I worked on this problem after I left Burma at the end of 1951 and came back to be on the China desk in the State Department. We really did try to do whatever we could to get these people out, and we succeeded partially, got a lot of them out, but not all of them. And some of them are still there. So that episode put a cloud on our relationship with Burma.

Q: You left Burma in 1951, and then you went back to the State Department. There was about a 20-year period before you came back to Burma as chief of mission?

MARTIN: That's right.

Q: Had you had anything to do with Burma in subsequent assignments?

MARTIN: Not really, except as I just mentioned. When I went back to the China desk, one of the problems which we had among a great many was this question of the KMT

troops in Burma, and the fact the Burmese had—I think this happened after I left Burma—they decided to kick our aid mission out and so forth. It was a continuing problem for several years, and the Burmese, I think, after an interval of two or three—I think three years—finally decided, I guess, that we really had done everything we could, (Laughs) and let our mission back in again. But aside from that, I really had nothing to do with Burma directly. I had one assignment that covered the whole of East Asia, and that was when I was the political advisor to the Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) in Honolulu. But because Burma was a neutralist country, a non-aligned country, and had no U.S. military aid, CINCPAC, who was at that time Admiral Felt, did not visit Burma. He had no reason to visit Burma. We visited just about every other country in the area. In fact, I think we did visit every other country in the area in the whole of East Asia Pacific area, except Burma, and North Korea, of course, and North Vietnam.

Q: I understand. And China.

MARTIN: And China mainland.

Q: In your dealings, since you were involved in Far Eastern affairs off and on for a good part of your career, did you find that Burma weighed at all in the balance?

MARTIN: No. Burma was very unimportant to the United States, except to some extent (especially when I went there as a young Chinese language officer) as a listening post as to what was going on in China. I think that was its principal importance in those days, as an observation post when we had withdrawn from China. It was in some ways a fairly good spot, although it was very remote from the capital of China and what was going on there. Nevertheless, Burma had a long border with China, and there was Chinese interest in the insurgency, in the BCP (the Burma Communist Party), the White Flag Communists. So that was the main importance. But naturally, that was, on a scale of world events, pretty minimal.

Q: How did your assignment as ambassador to Burma come about?

MARTIN: Well, I really don't know. It's one of those Washington mysteries, I guess. I would judge that it came about because at the time I was appointed, I was a career minister. I had held three consecutive posts with the rank of minister.

Q: Those posts were . . .

MARTIN: My first one was political advisor to CinCPac. I was given the rank of minister by President Kennedy. And next was deputy chief of mission in Ankara, where I was given the rank of minister by Johnson. And then as consul general in Hong Kong, which was a far larger, far more important and demanding post than being ambassador in Burma, I also had the rank of minister there. So in other words, I had been a pretty senior guy for my last three posts, and presumably was on some list of Foreign Service officers who were considered to be ripe for ambassadorship, and they looked around for one and decided that Burma was a logical place, and I think it was in many ways. I had experience there. Although I was a China language officer, you couldn't put us in China in those days, and Taiwan was already occupied.

Q: Your position as consul general in Hong Kong was actually, within the State Department, considered to be chief of mission.

MARTIN: Chief of mission, yes.

Q: A major chief of mission.

MARTIN: Yes. Well, at least I got the perks of the chief of mission and was considered chief of mission because, unlike other consul generals, I was not under the general supervision of an embassy. I was independent, in an independent post that reported directly to Washington.

At that time, particularly, Hong Kong was in the category of a chief of mission job because we had primary field responsibility for reporting on the whole of mainland China. I was there during the height of the cultural revolution, when we began to get far more information than we'd been able to get before, so that we had an important assignment beyond just Hong Kong. U.S. trade with Hong Kong exceeded $1 billion—and this was back in '69—for the first time in history, when I was there. We at one time, I think it was the Immigration Act of '68, was it, that opened up Asia? Asians—I think it was about that.

Q: '67.

MARTIN: '67, maybe. It probably was '67, because it was '68-'69 that we suddenly jumped into the forefront of visa issuing offices. I had a total staff there of 400, which was about four times what I had in Rangoon, and much larger than most embassies. So it was, in terms of importance, and especially at that time, I think, well deserving of being a chief of mission.

Q: You didn't have at that time any feeling that there were political appointees thirsting after the job of being chief of mission in Burma?

MARTIN: No, I don't think so. And I can't remember whether any political appointee has ever been sent to Burma. There have been appointees there, as there have been other places that were not career Foreign Service; they were USIA or possibly AID. [Martin later recalled that President Kennedy had appointed John S. Everton from the Ford Foundation as ambassador in 1961].

Q: But they came from within the professional ranks.

MARTIN: Yes. Yes, Burma is not a place that a political appointee would thirst after. (Laughs) I liked it very much, but one of the advantages of having the embassy in Burma

was that we were so much at the end of the line. I mean, there are very few capitals in the world that are further from Washington, D.C., than Rangoon.

Q: Just physically as well as mentally.

MARTIN: That's right. Since there weren't any burning issues—well, there was one major issue while I was there, which I'll get to. We were pretty well left alone, and we didn't have the high mucky-mucks in Washington concerned with our affairs, and I think the result of that is that our problems were handled mainly at the assistant secretary and deputy assistant secretary level most of the time. So we felt that—at least I felt—that I was listened to, and I didn't have the experience that some of my other colleagues did, having Nixon send out a special representative who totally ignored the ambassador in dealing with the government to which he was accredited. I had one person who more or less tried that, but he didn't push it very much.

Q: Who was that?

MARTIN: That was a fellow named Nelson Gross, who was the head of the State Department's anti-narcotics effort at that time. And this was the major U.S. Washington—at least the major Washington concern while I was chief of mission, was the . . .

Q: I wanted to ask you what were your instructions when you were sent out to Burma. This was in 1971?

MARTIN: '71, yes, in September.

Q: September '71. Did you have any?

MARTIN: Yes. Well, I don't remember anything specifically, but it was clear from the beginning that Washington's primary interest in Burma was the fact that it was a major source at that time of opium and, I subsequently found out, also of heroin, and that the golden triangle, consisting of Burma, Thailand, and Laos, their border areas, was at that

time considered a major source—probably was at that time—a major source of heroin. I mean, for the United States. But later on, now, for example, I don't think it's any longer a major source.

Another reason for the concern was that the Vietnam War, we were still in the Vietnam War at that time, and there was a lot of concern with the growing drug problem among GIs in Vietnam. Of course, that all came from the so-called golden triangle. And in the golden triangle, Burma at that time was the largest producer. So there was a very legitimate concern in Washington to try to somehow choke off, as much as possible, the supply of heroin. The base of heroin, of course, as you know, is opium, and a lot of opium was grown there.

Now, this was a very interesting problem, and certainly one of the most interesting and most delicate problems that I've had in my Foreign Service career, because we're dealing with a non-aligned, neutralist country, very sensitive to its nationalism. At the time, when we first broached this subject, and we broached it at the Ne Win level . . .

Q: He was . . .

MARTIN: I should probably fill in. One of the major things that happened between my first and second tours in Burma was that General Ne Win, who had been defense minister in the U Nu cabinet, when I was first in Burma, had, by a military coup, overthrown the democratic government of Burma, or basically democratic, I would say, and established not only, in effect, a military dictatorship, but eventually established, or brought in, a new ideology called the Burmese Way to Socialism, and eventually organized—and this happened just before I got out there as ambassador—as the Burmese Socialist Program Party, BSPP, which had a socialist ideology, but which carefully distinguished itself from Communist parties—in fact, fought Communist parties—but was also anti-capitalist and was a kind of mixture of Marxism, which was certainly a very strong element in it, Burmese Nationalism and Buddhism, the Buddhist principles. And Ne Win still runs the country in

1987; he's been in power for 25 years now. I think it was March 2 or March 4. It was early March of '62 that he took power, and he has not relinquished it, and any rivals that have come up mainly through the military, that he felt were rivals, he has disposed of. He hasn't shot them the way Stalin did, but he's exiled them to Maymyo or someplace like that.

Q: What was the name of the place?

MARTIN: Maymyo, which was a hill station, a British hill station. In other words, he has taken them out of the line of power, so that he's pretty well—in fact, his domination of the government is such that it's very difficult to get decisions made in Burma, and no one is willing to make a decision without checking with Ne Win, and he's sometimes out of the country or he's indisposed or he's on the golf course. In other words, it's a very difficult situation to deal with. He had a habit of not seeing—a policy of not seeing ambassadors privately, except when they presented their credentials and when they said farewell. He just liked it that way, and there wasn't anything you could do.

Well, that's all getting back to the delicate problem of that's the kind of government you're dealing with, non-aligned. We have no aid program; we had the remnants of an aid program, but we had had no new aid agreement with Burma since the coup. So we had absolutely zero leverage of any kind on the Burmese Government, none whatsoever. In fact, they tended to be suspicious of us because we were in so thick with the Thais. You know we had bases in Thailand.

Q: Those were the days when we were flying bombing missions out of Thailand.

MARTIN: We probably were still, yes.

Q: Just towards the end, I guess.

MARTIN: Yes. We were still in Vietnam, but the thing is, in Burmese eyes, and it's true, we were close allies of the Thais, and we had our military bases there and so forth, but Burma

and Thailand have been jealous of each other or rivals for several centuries. The Burmese regard the Thais as sort of city slickers, untrustworthy at best; and the Thais regard the Burmese as uncouth country bumpkins. So one of the problems that we faced was trying to get Thai-Burmese cooperation, because they have this long border, and there was a lot of narcotics smuggling going on. It was a very, very complex situation. When we first took up the question of doing something about Burma's opium-growing, most of which took place in the Shan states and Kachin state, which are over toward the Chinese border, most of this area was out of the control of the Burmese.

Q: The dissident movement was still . . .

MARTIN: Oh, yes. Insurgencies were still going on, the same ones that I mentioned before, except the Red Flag Communists had been pretty well wiped out. The White Flag Communists had I think, during the Sixties, late Sixties, suffered a rather serious defeat in their stronghold in the Pegu Yomas, which are the . . .

Q: Can I get you to spell that?

MARTIN: Yoma is the word for hill in Burmese, so the Pegu Yomas are hills just north of Rangoon that run up the central part of Burma. They're not high mountains. Their insurgency had been based there ever since independence, but with this defeat, they were pretty well driven out, and they went over and ensconced themselves along the China border, where they got logistic support and actual training and so forth.

Well, in this situation, when we first approached Ne Win, he was quite defensive; but on the other hand, from the Burmese point of view, certainly, what he said made a good deal of sense. First he looked at it from the historical point of view, which wasn't terribly relevant at that time, but it was sort of interesting background. According to the Burmese, it was the British who were responsible for the opium problem; they had encouraged opium-growing so they could sell it to China.

Q: There were the Opium Wars.

MARTIN: Yes, that was back in the 1840s, yes. So the Burmese, in the first place, were victimized by the British, and the second place, opium-growing had been confined to these fairly remote hill parts of Burma. It was not a problem. There was no addiction in Burma, except for some of these hill tribes who used opium and had for generations, and they used it in its raw state, and there was no heroin made anyway in Burma. So, “We've been growing opium for generations, thanks to the British. We don't have an addiction problem here, so why do you come running to us? There never was a problem before, so why do you come running to us?” I'm talking about the Burmese point of view. And, “If you have a problem, that's because of your society, some weaknesses or whatever. In other words, it's your fault. Why should you blame it on us? We've been growing for all these years. You've never had a problem; now you've got a problem. Don't blame us.”

Well, as I say, there was a good deal of truth in that. They didn't have a problem in terms of their own addiction, and we did. So it's pretty hard to convince somebody where they've been growing opium for years. The Turks were similar, actually. They didn't have an addiction problem in Turkey, really, although they grew opium there. But that's a different story.

Well, so we didn't get very far with the initial approaches.

Q: This was when you first came out?

MARTIN: This was in the fall of '71, yes.

Q: Had there been approaches prior to that?

MARTIN: I don't think so, at least not a major push. Under the Nixon Administration, in '71, they decided they would make a major push. This was a policy decision that I think was made in Washington. I don't know when; maybe it was summer. But they were going

to make a big push on the golden triangle area. But at that time, both Laos and Thailand were areas where we had a large presence and so forth. But in Burma, we had it totally different. We didn't have leverage in Burma at all, and we're dealing with people who were very sensitive about their nationalism, about their non-alignment and so on. So the best we could get out of that was that they did agree to having an information exchange, because some of the information we had on what was going on in Burma with opium-growing—in other words, our information was that it was a considerably larger problem, and there was considerable export; the Burmese didn't have that intelligence, and the main reason they didn't was that they weren't really in control of that area.

Then our intelligence people had come up with the allegation, which turned out to be true, that some of the irregular forces that were employed by the Burmese Government, along with their regular army, to fight the insurgents—and I'll give you the Burmese name, but let's not bother with it here; they were called the Ka Kwe Ye, let's call them Burmese irregular forces—were under a general of Chinese extraction, probably many of them were ethnic Chinese or Shans, and the general's name was Lo Hsing Han. Well, our intelligence people had come up with pretty good evidence that Lo Hsing Han and the Ka Kwe Ye, the irregular forces, were deep into the opium-smuggling business. Of course, we were exchanging this information with the Burmese Government. Our intelligence people came up with even more damning information; that was that there were actually heroin refineries in the jungles on the Burmese side of the Thai-Burma border. And this was particularly damning because the Burmese had denied that there were any heroin refineries. But we got more and more evidence, and, of course, in Thailand, we had a team of DEA people, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and they were working with the Thais, and they were getting intelligence from the Thais.

Q: The intelligence was basically coming from . . .

MARTIN: I think most of it was coming from Thailand, yes. I think most of it was, because these refineries were right close to the border, and the intelligence was that heroin was

being refined in Burma under the supervision of Chinese chemists, and then being smuggled into Thailand. Of course, once you refine opium into heroin, it's much easier to smuggle. Opium is much more bulky. It was being smuggled across the border by the Ka Kwe Ye primarily, but also to some extent by insurgent groups, and then coming down through Thailand through the main channel to other Southeast Asian countries—Hong Kong, where there's quite a drug addiction problem, and then eventually getting into the West Coast of the United States. The Burmese were somewhat skeptical of this, and we kept working on them, and we had visitors come out, including Bud Krogh, who was on the White House staff.

Q: He became involved in the Watergate affair, didn't he?

MARTIN: Oh, yes, yes. In fact, two of the people I've mentioned wound up in legal difficulties. One was Krogh, although I was very sorry to hear about Krogh, because in dealings I had with him, he seemed to be a fine guy. I think he was just one of these fellows that was blinded by loyalty to his boss and got into trouble. The other was Nelson Gross, who was accused of violating laws when he was Chairman of the Republican Party of New Jersey, so it had nothing to do with Watergate or anything to do with the narcotics thing. We didn't know it at the time, of course.

Other people came out occasionally, visiting—a fellow named Minnick, I can't remember others, all to see how we were doing and encourage us and so forth. So we kept working away at this, and the Burmese, I think, my own personal belief—and I can't prove this, but the timing is such—when they finally decided to go beyond just exchange of information, had a good deal to do with the fact that they began having a drug problem for the first time.

Q: This is within the cities, not out in the field.

MARTIN: No, they didn't care about what they did. Also, this is heroin, you see. This is heroin. It wasn't opium; it was heroin. Heroin started to come first into the Shan states, in places like Taungyi, which is the capital of the southern Shan states, and eventually

even into other cities and down to Rangoon. The people who were getting this drug were, as it was in other countries, young people from what would pass in Burma as the more privileged class. In other words, the children of the Army officers and maybe of high civil officials and so forth. Then the Burmese officials began to get worried. They began to believe that they did have a problem and that the heroin maybe did come from Burma, because how else would it get in there?

So finally, and this was a rather dramatic thing, one of our embassy officers who was working with the Burmese on this and with Burmese intelligence, persuaded them and the Army. I think there were people in the government all the time who were more concerned than Ne Win and some of the higher-ups were, and I think their cooperation was very important.

Q: Whom were you dealing with in the government?

MARTIN: I dealt with the foreign ministry.

Q: Ne Win?

MARTIN: I think the only time I saw Ne Win was when Gross came out, and I don't think I saw him on any other occasion. I dealt with the foreign minister or people just under him.

Q: I see.

MARTIN: But we also had Army contacts. We had attach#s there, and we had intelligence contacts. Finally, we got the people concerned in the Burmese Government, not the foreign ministry, but more on the enforcement side to take an Army plane and fly over the area where our intelligence said there were opium refineries. And an embassy officer, whom I will not name, who was very instrumental in getting a lot of these good results, was on the plane. When they flew over the jungle just north of the Thai border and didn't spot anything, he thought, “Our whole scheme is going to blow up.” Finally, just when

he was about to give up, they flew over a ridge and they spotted the refineries. There was a whole line of long houses that obviously were refineries, which we had told the Burmese about. And that was a very decisive moment, because then they could see with their own eyes that we were not kidding, heroin was being refined there. And then the Burmese Government started investigating Lo Hsing Han and the Ka Kwe Ye, whom they had believed were their allies who had helped fight the Communist insurgents and so forth. So they found there was a lot of corruption in the Ka Kwe Ye; and a certain amount among lower level Burmese Army officers. In other words, they found that what we'd been patiently telling them, which had been building up over a period of time with collection of intelligence and so forth, was true.

Once they found out it was true, plus the fact—and I think, there again, they began seeing they were themselves beginning to have a drug problem among their youths—they turned over a leaf and began to go after the problem. They bombed the refineries, and they went after Lo Hsing Han, and assigned a special force of four or five battalions to go after the Ka Kwe Ye. They cornered them down by the Thai border, and just at the time the troops were surrendering, Lo went across the border, and the Thais arrested him, much to his surprise. He'd always been able to go across, because the Thais, as I said, didn't have any particular love for the Burmese, and vice versa, but that's another thing that we'd worked on to try to get some cooperation between the Thais and the Burmese. So we alerted the Thais to the fact that this opium smuggler was coming across.

Q: Other than intelligence, did we play any role in military aid?

MARTIN: Well, eventually. Now, the upshot of all this was that the Burmese Government asked for [assistance]—we had said right along, “We want to help you,” The first thing was to get them to see that there was a problem and want to do something about it. Once they did this—and this was one of the last negotiations I had with them before I left—and I negotiated a bit with Washington on this, too, they asked for helicopters so they could drop troops in and clean out the refineries, and also so they could spot the smugglers. Once

they disposed of the Ka Kwe Ye, then some of the Shan insurgents, Kachin insurgents, and BCP, which now controls a lot of the opium-growing area, were smuggling the stuff out.

The people—now we get back to the KMT troops—the remnants of the KMT troops still there found, “Here's a great thing! Here's a good thing! We can be the transporters of this opium.” And so they became transporters of the opium, and they had the caravans. Not the sole ones, but some of the more important ones into Thailand. So the Burmese, I think they made out a good case, said, “We need some helicopters to get these guys in the jungle. We need to spot the caravans.” So we strongly recommended that they start out with six helicopters, and this is one of the last things I dealt with before leaving Burma.

We had some opposition in Washington from people who said, “This is just a cover for the Burmese to get some military equipment to fight their rebels, their insurgents.”

Q: Where was the opposition coming from?

MARTIN: I really don't know.

Q: Was it the Pentagon?

MARTIN: No, I don't think it was the Pentagon. I think it might have been somewhere in the State Department. I'm not sure where. Questions were being raised. And possibly also in Congress. There might have been some opposition there. But the upshot was that eventually approval came. I remember arguing that obviously we can't guarantee they're not going to use these helicopters against insurgents. In the first place, a lot of the smugglers are insurgents! (Laughs) But if we're serious about cutting down the opium—and I might say, the result of all this was that there was a very significant drop in the amount of opium that was being exported. I can't give you the exact figures, but it was more than 50%. It was a very significant drop.

The upshot was that eventually the Burmese got, after my time, the helicopters, they came in '74. I think they eventually got as many as 20 helicopters. Maybe that was after my time—15 or 20. They got a light plane and so forth. Then we began to cooperate on other things, too. The U.N., by the way, had a mission in there which we cooperated with, I forget the initials, but they were a branch of one of these permanent organizations of the U.N. that fights drugs worldwide. They came into Burma. They didn't have quite the problem we did, because Burma has been a pretty staunch supporter of the U.N. Of course, U Thant, who, during my first tour in Burma, was information minister in the Burmese Cabinet, eventually became Secretary General of the U.N. So the U.N. was in there. They were working on the crop substitution angle.

Q: This would be planting something . . .

MARTIN: Something besides opium. Of course, that's a tough one to do, because nothing makes money like opium. (Laughs)

Q: You'd just been through this as deputy chief of mission in Ankara?

MARTIN: Right. That's right, so I was familiar with the U.N. activity. We're still—I was just reading the other day something from Wilson Center, when they had our ambassador — our previous ambassador to Burma, O'Donahue, at this symposium on Burma last spring, last March, I think it was. He was still talking about the cooperation of the Burmese Government in spraying, and how we're spraying the opium crop with herbicides to kill it and so forth. So what we started back there has continued and developed. Burma now, I think, if you look—I haven't followed this in recent years, but my impression is that if you look at the major suppliers of opium that comes into the United States now, the golden triangle is nowhere near what it used to be. In fact, you hardly see it mentioned. Mexico, Pakistan, and places like that are the big places I've seen mentioned.

Q: What were some of the other issues?

MARTIN: Well, we would go regularly with the circulars that came out every year when the U.N. General Assembly met, and go around and ask the Burmese to vote this way and that. Those things we would do as routine, but the Burmese were very non-aligned, very independent. I used to argue, and I used to tell the Department—I think the Department came to appreciate this, “Look, Burma isn't like Cuba and other countries and some Arab countries that say they're not aligned both vote right down the line most of the time with the Soviets. The Burmese really are non-aligned.”

But I should mention their relationship with China. Of course, we didn't even bother with the Chinese representation issue. Burma was the first non-Communist country that recognized the People's Republic. That happened just before I got there, the month before I first got to Burma. And one of the unhappy figures that I became somewhat acquainted with before he left Burma was the Nationalist ambassador, the Chinese ambassador, who was, of course, without a job when Burma recognized the P.R.C. I was there when the Communist ambassador came in. This was back in 1950. We learned that the Burmese —of course, they never said anything about this out loud—but the Burmese were very unhappy, because one of the men that he brought in as secretary of the embassy was an intelligence operative whom the Burmese Government had put on their wanted list. (Laughs) But the Burmese were very polite at that time with the Chinese. Of course, they have a problem historically with China. There's an old saying in Burma that when China spits, Burma swims. That's because they have this huge neighbor, and it's an age-old problem. They have to get along with them, but they have maintained their independence, I think.

Q: You, as a Chinese-speaking officer, did you have any activity with the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon?

MARTIN: Not really. We began speaking to each other, of course, once Kissinger went with Nixon to China, and so forth, and that was a period of some cordiality. But we didn't really have any business relations. The effect was that we shook hands at diplomatic

receptions. I have a souvenir, which every chief of mission got from his colleagues upon his departure, and it has the name of the Chinese ambassador on it. Before the Nixon visit they would never have thought of doing that. So although we did not establish diplomatic relations, nevertheless, that was a big breakthrough, in Burma it noticeably affected our relations, but they were strictly social relations.

Q: You weren't exchanging drug information or anything like this?

MARTIN: Oh, no. In fact, I don't think the Burmese even had been doing this. You see, the Burmese, on the one hand, had diplomatic and very correct relations with the Chinese in Peking, and they had an ambassador there, and the foreign minister went there and so forth. But at the same time, they knew darn well that the Chinese were aiding the Burmese Communist Party insurgents.

Q: These are the White Flag?

MARTIN: The White Flag. The Red Flag, by that time, had pretty well been wiped out. They were always a smaller group anyway. And as a matter of fact, a year or two after I left Burma, I can't remember whether it was '74 or '75—I think it was still '74, maybe, it was not long after that for the first time, the Burmese Government found that there were actually Chinese cadres fighting with the BCP on Burmese territory. Now, we had not noticed that before. But there was a lot of evidence of Chinese support. Now, this was at a time when the Cultural Revolution was still going on and so forth, and there had been a time in the late Sixties, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, when there had been demonstrations in Rangoon, and there had been some rioting, and there had been some people issuing forth from the Chinese Embassy shouting anti-Burmese slogans. So relations with China had gotten pretty bad, and the Burmese were, I think, happy—

Q: You were saying that the Burmese were relieved when the United States and China started to come together.

MARTIN: Yes, because they felt that enmity between China and the United States was always a threat to the security of Southeast Asian countries including Burma. They thought there was more chance for peace when the United States and China started to come together. After all, they don't have any power, really, or influence in international affairs. The best they can do is to defend their own independence and maintain a non-aligned position, which is not only balancing Communist and non-Communist powers, but balancing Russia and China up against each other internally, to the extent that they can. On the other hand, I think they were a little worried that we might just pull out of Southeast Asia altogether. It's a funny situation, because while they would consistently vote against security measures that we took—for example, they were opposed to our role in Vietnam—nevertheless, they realized that their ability to pursue a neutralist non-aligned policy depended on a certain balance of power in the area, and that the United States was an extremely important element in that balance of power. And if we pulled out of Southeast Asia, they would be left to face an unbalanced situation.

Of course, I might say that what developed in southeast Asia after I left Burma was that you began to have a Sino-Soviet rivalry, which is part of the balance of power now.

Q: But it still keeps one power from becoming dominant.

MARTIN: That's right. That's what they're interested in. So basically, I think, they feel—I don't know. I haven't been back to Burma, but I'm sure that with the demise of the cultural revolution and the taking over of China by people who are more pragmatic, I should think the Burmese might feel a little more comfortable than they did at the time I left, when they were so worried about the BCP insurgency and China's role, and they worried about what was going to happen in Vietnam and all that sort of thing.

Q: Were there any other concerns of the United States, like offshore petroleum?

MARTIN: Yes, yes. I'm glad you mentioned that. That was of concern, as far as our U.S. government was concerned, only to the extent that American firms, American companies, be given a shot at the offshore oil. And they were. Because Burma is a Socialist government, and private enterprise is discouraged and limited to small affairs, when the government negotiated an agreement with an American company, an oil company or a consortium, they wanted very much to have some official U.S. presence, because they seemed to be sensitive to dealing with a capitalist company. (Laughs) And although it was made clear the United States Government had no part in this agreement, they wanted us present. So I would be present when the agreement was initialed in the Foreign Ministry, as a concession to the Burmese sensitivities on this thing. So we did have a role in getting certain concessions for offshore drilling. Unfortunately, nothing ever came of it. They found a lot of gas, but they never found commercially exploitable oil reserves.

From Washington I learned that some companies—and I don't remember the names of the companies, and it's not important—had learned that I had gone with a representative of one of their rival American companies to the Foreign Ministry to negotiate this agreement. They complained about this, saying I was showing favoritism. I said, “Nonsense. I'd do this for any American company. I don't care about one over the other. I'd do it for any American company. Furthermore, it was not my idea. I did it because the Burmese Government requested it and because of their particular ideological and economic policies.” So nothing more came of that, and I would have done it for any company.

Q: Do we have any other interests there? Tourism?

MARTIN: Well, in those days, there was very little tourism. Actually, the year that I came to Burma, nothing but just a coincidence, the Burmese, under Ne Win, for almost ten years had only allowed—well, first, 24-hour visas and then 48-hour visas, which was as good as excluding everybody. Who would go to Burma for two days or one day? But that year,

1971, they began issuing one-week visas, and now in 1987, I understand they still have one-week visas. One week is all you can go there for.

Q: Is one week about it as far as a tourist goes anyway?

MARTIN: Well, it depends on the tourist. For people who are really interested in Burma and its culture, one week is nothing. But if you want to see Pagan and Mandalay and something around Rangoon, you can do it in a week. That's very true. But the Burmese do their best—it's perhaps not quite as bad as it is in China, as I understand it—to keep foreign tourists as much as they can separated from the Burmese population. (Laughs) They're somehow afraid that the Burmese are going to get corrupted by foreign influence.

Q: You had already come from being both a deputy chief of mission in Ankara and running a very large post in Hong Kong and all, so you were an experienced officer in running a large thing. How did you find the staff? Although smaller, was it an effective staff?

MARTIN: Well, it wasn't, I would say, on the whole, as able as my top officers were in bigger posts, but that's not surprising in a way.

Q: No, no.

MARTIN: I thought they were competent, and we had no major problems. There are not many Burma specialists, as you can imagine, because it's not a country where you can even spend more than maybe a couple of tours. But I thought I had no problem with them. We had a difficult situation, of course, because it was impossible to have really close relations with the Burmese, not only the Burmese Government officials, but Burmese citizens. People in the universities and so forth would find it scary to come to a reception or dinner at my place, probably less so at other officers'.

Q: Would they be visited by intelligence officers?

MARTIN: Yes, they would be. In fact, they told us that they had to give reports. I remember I gave one reception for some visiting delegation of doctors of the United States, the head of the American Heart Association and other doctors, cardiologists. I just happen to remember this particular reception. Some uninvited Burmese showed up, which was not too surprising. It turned out he was a guy from their counterintelligence or whatever. We had that happen. Burmese said, “Well, I'm sorry, but it's just not worth going to your house, because we have to send in a report,” and they didn't want to. So there was close surveillance kept, and that obviously put on a real damper. (Laughs) Q: There was a difficult situation in your embassy, I would imagine, in that much of your work was really intelligence work, not against the government, but because of the narcotics business.

MARTIN: That's right. We worked on that basis. We did work with them, and increasingly so with the foreign minister and with the Burmese intelligence.

Q: Every year we find there's another problem of our intelligence services, whether it's CIA, Drug Enforcement Agency, or what have you, becoming a bit free-wheeling, looking for the short-term gain rather than the long-term. How did you find this?

MARTIN: I felt very lucky. Of course, it wasn't a place like Thailand, for example, where you had a huge organization. In Thailand, as I understand it, the embassy for a while fought having DEA people there, but they finally had to give in, and they had all these attach#s. In Burma, because it was non-aligned, because it was very sensitive and everything, they didn't try to force unwanted staff on me. And the people I did have from other agencies were extremely cooperative. I was very pleased.

Q: You felt you were kept informed of what was going on, rather than something happening.

MARTIN: Very much so. Yes. Nothing happened that surprised me. The station chief there was very, very cooperative, and really believed in the general directive given by President Kennedy. They were supposed to keep the ambassador informed.

Q: This was a general directive that Kennedy first came and said a chief of mission is chief of the mission.

MARTIN: And is to be informed.

Q: Of everything that's going on. That had worked in some places and certainly not in others.

MARTIN: Not in others. Well, I think, obviously, if something went on that I didn't know about, then I can't tell you, because I didn't know about it. As far as I know, nothing that was of any significance occurred, and there were no surprises. As I say, I felt that I got excellent cooperation and loyalty from the people there.

Q: Beginning to wind up this very interesting discussion, what did you feel were your main accomplishments while you were in Burma?

MARTIN: Well, obviously the main accomplishment, I think, was that we did secure the cooperation from the Burmese Government on the narcotics thing, which was the principal priority job and priority interest that the U.S. had in Burma during my tenure there. And I was very, very pleased with that. Otherwise, it was just sort of keeping things on an even keel. Just to give you an idea, I think I mentioned the fact that we had no economic aid agreement since the 1962 coup, but to show how slowly the Burmese Government operated, when I was there, we still had one or two aid projects, which were still going on. (Laughs) Q: What sort of projects?

MARTIN: Well, the very last one we had that was still being financed by money appropriated in '62, was a teak mill. One of Burma's primary exports was teak wood,

and still is. In fact, I think I saw the other day that it's threatened to overtake rice. That's because rice has been . . .

Q: A glut in the market now.

MARTIN: Perhaps, yes. And under the British, Burma was the number one rice exporter in the world.

Anyway, we had minor things, like gifts of blankets when they had an earthquake, gifts of athletic equipment, gifts of books, and that sort of thing. We kept, I think, a positive image of the United States in Burma, and the only serious incident we had was towards the end of my tour, when a helicopter with American personnel aboard, which was part of the anti-narcotics thing in Thailand, strayed across the border and landed in Burma, near an Army post near the border. It's one of those things that happens. The helicopter landed and then tried to take off, and the Burmese Army shot at it and forced it down. An American on board was detained. I forget how long it took us to get this guy out, but he wasn't detained more than a couple of weeks, which I thought was pretty good for the Burmese. The helicopter had violated Burmese territory, and they had a perfect right to do everything they did. The idea that they were going to jump up and let the guy go immediately didn't really make sense from their point of view. I thought they came through as well as we could have hoped for in the situation, given their relations with Thailand and so forth.

Q: Did you have any great frustration or anything that you wish you could have done differently?

MARTIN: Well, I imagine the main frustration I had, really, was that I wasn't able to see Ne Win, because I knew that's where the power was. But since all the other mission chiefs shared that problem, why, that helped a bit. This included the Japanese ambassador, although Japan was by far the major aid-giver at that time. The United States was giving nothing. He finally got to the point where he sent the message back through the Foreign

Ministry, I guess, that, “My government is not going to continue to provide major aid to Burma if I'm unable to see General Ne Win.” So he finally got in to see him, but it was because of a pure and simple threat that he could.

Q: It was purchased.

MARTIN: Yes. Which I didn't have. I did find that the Burmese officials, in terms of my personal relations, were generally polite, and some were really cordial, and the foreign minister that we had most of the time that I was there was in that category—Kyaw Soe. He was one of the original revolutionary council members. In other words, one of the original coup group, an Army officer. He was a devout Buddhist, as far as I could tell. He also believed firmly in the ideology of the Burmese Way to Socialism. But a very pleasant guy, one you could approach. On the other hand, he was—well, I'll tell you a story about him. When he came to Washington, and this was—I can't remember exactly; I think in about June or the summer of '73, although don't hold me to that date—anyway, he had been attending a non-aligned conference somewhere in Latin America, in Venezuela or Colombia or something like that, a non-aligned conference, and so we thought, well, the Burma desk thought, and I endorsed it, to invite him up to meet the Secretary, to call on the Secretary, because he was going to be in Washington, apparently, and coming privately. So we arranged this.

The Secretary at that time was Rogers. I had first become acquainted with Rogers when he visited Hong Kong in 1969. So the Burma desk prepared a briefing for Rogers, as they usually do when you have a visiting foreign minister. (Laughs) So Kyaw Soe came in, his very smiley self, you know, very pleasant and everything, and he sat there. And Rogers, an affable, experienced man as he was, made the pitch that we suggested that he make, and then he had all these answers to questions in case Kyaw Soe brought them up. But Kyaw Soe just sat there and grinned. So finally, Rogers decided that although Kyaw Soe hadn't asked these questions, he would give our answers. As he went through the whole briefing paper, Kyaw Soe didn't say a word, except, “Yes,” or, “No,” or “Thank you.” Never

asked a single question. And it was a fiasco! (Laughs) I thought it gave our people in the State Department some idea of what we'd been dealing with right along, you know. And Kyaw Soe was at least affable and pleasant, whereas some of the other people were very short and wouldn't give you the time of day. That was not true of the career officers in the Burmese government, of course, the people who are just below the political appointee level. They were a fine, able bunch of people on the whole. I thought they were very fine to deal with.

Q: It may be somewhat facetious, but I noticed in reading a bit about Burma before this interview that golf comes up quite a bit.

MARTIN: Golf? Yes.

Q: For a Marxist, austere state, to hear about the officers worried about not having golfing equipment strikes me as peculiar.

MARTIN: That's very important. Just to show how important it is, I had never been a golfer. I might have been out on the course two or three times before I went to Burma, at the most, because tennis has been my bag. Well, I deliberately decided that I was going to take up golf in Burma, because it was so hard to get acquainted with Burmese officials at the cabinet level or sub-cabinet level, because we had so little business with Burma, and there was so little reason to call on them after you made your initial calls and so forth. I decided I'd take up golf. And it paid off to some extent. The reason that I did, practically all of them played golf. There was hardly a person in the revolutionary council that didn't play, and I understand that for them it was also politically wise to do it, because Ne Win was an ardent golfer. Apparently this was popular in the upper echelons of the Army. They learned from the British, I'm sure.

Q: Quite true in Korea, too.

MARTIN: Yes, yes. So I never became more than a hacker at golf. Nevertheless, it gave me an opportunity to mix with people like Kyaw Soe and others on an informal basis, especially after the game. We'd sit around and have some beers and so forth, and it at least made me feel that I knew these officials. (Laughs) So that was my way of trying to get around the barrier that they put up against foreigners and foreign diplomats in particular. And it paid off. Now, I never played golf with Ne Win. There again, he had a deliberate policy of not socializing with foreign officials and with the foreign diplomats. There were two or three Americans whom he had known in various capacities or places, private citizens who came out and visited Burma, and he entertained them and played golf with them and so forth. But if he did it with one diplomat, he'd have to do it with all. The Burmese were very careful about their non-alignment. We would joke sometimes, if I were to make a presentation of anything, like blankets or whatever, they would always have this in the paper, then they'd have something from the East Bloc in the same paper, or vice versa. If they had some visitor from the East Bloc in the newspaper, they would contrive some way of putting me, or somebody in the American embassy, or maybe the British embassy, in the same paper just to balance things out. They were very careful about this. But golf was—I just attribute it to the fact that they learned this from the British in British times, and it became popular in the Army, and Ne Win particularly liked it, so if Ne Win liked it, everybody had to like it.

Q: I think we've reached the end, unless you have something else you'd like to add.

MARTIN: No.

Q: Just as a general question, how did you find the Foreign Service? I mean, looking back on this, was it something that you would recommend to members of your family?

MARTIN: So as far as how I personally felt about the service, in looking back on it, I think I was in the Foreign Service during one of its most interesting times, in maybe its hey-day. I think during the Fifties and Sixties, maybe in the early Seventies, the Foreign Service,

on the whole, perhaps had more influence than it does today. I may be wrong. In any case, it's not the same service, it seems to me. It's become—well, I think there are a lot of problems, for example, that make it very difficult. The problem of women's lib and the difficulties of finding posts suitable for wives who are interested in doing something on their own, which my wife was very interested in doing at a time when this wasn't the fad. But somehow—and it may be the old fogey looking back—it just doesn't seem to me to be the challenging and exciting career that I had. Now, how can you generalize from one man's experience? I certainly feel that I was lucky in many ways, that I probably had a career that was much more exciting and challenging than a lot of Foreign Service officers had, a lot of which was due to luck.

But I think, also, young people now perhaps are more demanding of immediate promotion. Take the young lawyers, I understand, you know, they can command salaries in the range of senior Foreign Service officers when they first go in. And there's always been some disparity, but not that much.

Q: And we're recruiting from basically the same pool.

MARTIN: Yes.

Q: That go in to become rather hot-shot young lawyers or hot-shot young Foreign Service officers.

MARTIN: It seems to me that before, we had a lot more flexibility. Of course, we were a lot smaller. When I came into the Foreign Service, there were a total of 850 officers in the whole Foreign Service. Now, out of the population of the United States, that's incredibly miniscule. And we've grown, and we should have grown.

So as far as recommendation is concerned, I would say if you're interested in international affairs, yes, look into the Foreign Service and look into it very carefully, examine all the aspects of it and the problem you have with what is your wife going to do, or your future

wife, and what flexibility do you have, and are you willing to put up with the hazards of it, which are certainly more than they were in my day, although it had begun to be hazardous. (I was, according to our intelligence, on a hit list in Burma, of Arab terrorists. One thing about Burma was it was easier to spot them than in a lot of other countries, because it was such an isolationist country.) I used to emphasize to people who would ask me, the college students, that in the first place, you can't expect to get into the Service right out of college, which was still possible in my day. You almost now have to have graduate work. You have to be willing to abide by certain discipline, and you have to expect fairly slow progress compared to others. You have the satisfaction of serving your country, which to me was very important. And I don't know what they're doing to the retirement system. When you looked at the financial benefits in my day, you might not go up in income nearly as fast as some of your colleagues that went into law or medicine or something like that, but there was an extremely good retirement system, which you had to consider as being part of the package, a very important part. Now, it seems to me they're beginning to cut away at that. I got out after 35 years of service, not 35 actual years, but 35 counting towards . . .

Q: Including military.

MARTIN: Including military and time and a half. I had three posts where I got time and a half. Four posts with time and a half. So I accumulated my 35 years.

Q: We're speaking of time and a half for retirement credit.

MARTIN: Yes, which a lot of people didn't like, because that's a long way off. But boy, I'll tell you, it paid off in my case. I didn't really have any choice; it was just one of those things. But it meant that I could retire after 32 and a half years, with 35 years, the equivalent of 35 years' service. As you know, after 35 years, you usually don't gain much by staying in in terms of retirement under the old system. So that enabled me to retire with close to my maximum pension and still do things like teach in college for six years, publish two books, working on a third, and do a lot of things that I couldn't do in the Foreign

Service. And that was one of the big advantages of the old retirement system, and one of the advantages that I think we were aware of when we went in as young officers, that this was something you could do. In fact, it was talked up to me.

Q: Today it's rather amorphous.

MARTIN: It is. Yes, it is amorphous.

Q: I'm not sure whether it's good or bad.

MARTIN: Well, I don't know, but, of course, I saw the service make a transition from the old service, when they only took in 35 officers a year. It was very small, and we didn't have the kind of responsibilities we did in the world after World War II. I will say that in the mid-Fifties, the beginning of the mid-Fifties, our whole economic compensation package was better than it had ever been. Not only were our salaries increased, but we got much more regular home leave and things like that than they used to in the old service. The old service, after the Rogers Act, you didn't need a private income, but it sure helped. It always helps. But, I think, starting in the Fifties, it began to be a career where you could really feel comfortable financially, especially about your future.

So I don't know. I just say if you have that inclination now as a young man . . .

Q: Or a young woman.

MARTIN: Or a young woman, that's right. I should say young woman; that's very important. Look into it very, very carefully. But I'll just give you one more thought. A friend of mine, who is an old friend, a Foreign Service colleague now retired, had a son who went through college and worked for a congressman, and got interested in political things, and he was very interested in the Foreign Service, and he took the exam and passed it. Then he got married. I think it was some woman that he'd met who was also working on the Hill. Well, after looking into this thing and all the angles including the wife's angle

and everything else, he decided not to go in the Foreign Service, and I think his father was rather disappointed. But I think it's just more complicated now. (Laughs) It's a more complicated world, perhaps, that we live in. I certainly would not recommend against it, but I would not recommend it without very, very careful examination and looking at other alternatives.

One more thing. The second year after I got out of the Foreign Service, I was a lecturer at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University here. I had been somewhat acquainted with the school before, although I didn't go there; I went to Fletcher. And the one big difference I noticed was that there are now far more possibilities for people interested in international relations. There are international organizations galore which never existed back in '41, when I came in the service. The American economic expansion abroad has been very great compared to those days. In other words, there are many alternatives to the Foreign Service for people interested in getting into the international field which simply did not exist in the old days. Simply did not exist. Which means there's more competition in a sense. The Foreign Service is getting good recruits. On the other hand, the people who before had a few banks and one or two, very few corporations . . .

Q: Such as Goodyear.

MARTIN: That's right, a few places like that. Now there's just tremendous numbers of them, comparatively speaking. So a person has a lot more choice than he did before. Looking back on it, it's just lucky, in a way. You feel when the Service only took in 35 or 40 people a year, how come you were one of them? (Laughs) It's just luck. Well, perhaps one reason was that there also was not the interest in foreign affairs that there is today, so there weren't as many people applying.

Q: Ed, thank you very much.

MARTIN: I hope this will be useful to somebody.

End of interview